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## Editorial

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## Editorial

*John Butcher, University of Northampton*

It gives me great pleasure to welcome readers to the second edition of *Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education* (ELEHE), the University of Northampton's flagship open access e-journal. If this is the first time you have come across this journal, I sincerely hope you enjoy what you read and feel able to recommend it to colleagues.

As explained in the inaugural editorial, ELEHE is a fully refereed English language journal with an international outlook, addressing the emerging field of enhancement in higher education as it impacts on learners. The journal has a serious mission, to provide HE colleagues internationally an opportunity to publish and read scholarly work investigating the learner experience across all forms of higher education. We are driven by a commitment to participatory modes of research, especially research which explores the student journey through the student voice. Recognising scholarship around the learner experience is being undertaken by lecturers, researchers, study support staff, academic developers, librarians and policymakers, we take a broad view of our potential audience for this journal, and welcome both dialogue about what has been published, and potential contributions.

In the nine months that have elapsed since my first editorial, the even more volatile context in which HE operates seems to provide an especially pressing rationale for a journal researching the learner experience. In the UK, and globally, government spending cuts are likely to drive a significant reconceptualisation of the student learning experience in HE. Issues likely to impact include: the rapid rise in attention given to the learning quality agenda (at a time of significant increases in fees); the increased scrutiny given to 'graduateness' and employability skills at a time of rising unemployment; the demand for greater flexibility in the delivery of learning, including the embedding of technology-enhanced learning as part of an enhanced learning experience.

Given all these external issues, in this second edition of ELEHE I am delighted to publish a range of articles which provide an evidence base from which to prompt critical reflection on the need to enhance the learning experience, and the barriers that might still inhibit student success.

A key theme in this edition is inclusion: the extent to which universities which pronounce themselves committed to widening participation and broadening access need to scrutinise their activities to ensure a positive learning experience for all students. For example, the importance of pedagogic partnerships to scaffold the transition into HE is outlined in Lumsden et al, with a recognition that prior learning experiences need to be taken into account to increase retention and achievement for potentially vulnerable Education students. Related to this, the experience of dyslexic and non-dyslexic students on professional health courses are compared in Crouch's article, with the support provided by Personal Academic Tutors highlighted. Extending our understanding of inclusivity in relation to HE assessment practices, Butcher et al researched some 'hard-to-reach' and struggling students, and as a result recommend fair and transparent assessment systems which allow all students to demonstrate what they know and can do.

A second theme arose from the university's recent *Learning Dialogues* conference, at which the article from Powis was originally presented as a paper. In this, he emphasises the opportunity for universities to take account of student needs and preferences in relation to learning spaces, particularly the recognition of the places where extended learning takes place. His recommendation that universities 'build-in' the affective dimension for learners into their building plans is a valuable one. Related to this recognition of what students bring to their learning (and what assumptions cannot be made), Towle and Howe describe a useful methodology to elicit understanding of learners' prior journeys through educational technology.

A third, and perhaps overarching theme, is provided by Northcott, who demonstrates the importance of Continuing Professional Development for education professionals, and its sustained impact on learner-centred teaching.

All these articles suggest the enhancement of the learner experience in HE is worthy of close scrutiny. I hope you find this second edition useful, stimulating and informative.

I am very grateful to all the authors for submitting their work for peer review, and to the anonymous reviewers (drawn from the journal's international editorial board and institutional advisory board) for their hard work in reading and commenting on articles so promptly.

The aspiration remains that ELEHE will be a biennial publication, and we aim to publish our third edition early summer 2011. For the first time, this will be a special themed edition, focussing on international dimensions to the learner experience. It will complement our next Learning and Teaching conference 'Learning Global' (May 2011). I look forward to receiving potential articles from a wide range of authors, addressed through:

Substantive credible research of 4-6,000 words

Critical case studies of institutional practice

Shorter accounts of work in progress

Please contact the editor if you or your colleagues have ideas which merit dissemination through *Enhancing the Learner Experience in Higher Education*.